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Baucus to bring EPA chief to Libby May 26

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Mike Leavitt will make good on his promise to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., and visit Libby on May 26, Baucus said in a press release April 6.

Mr. Baucus said he hopes "an on-site tour ... will help jolt asbestos contamination cleanup efforts [in Libby]."

Mr. Baucus supported Leavitt's nomination to head the EPA last year after receiving a commitment that the former Utah governor would visit Libby personally and help the town recover from years of asbestos exposure from the defunct W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine that operated here until 1990.

"I'm glad to announce that Governor Leavitt will visit Libby, because it will be so important for him to see personally, with his own eyes, the devastation asbestos has caused there," Baucus said. "I



BAUCUS

want Governor Leavitt to see and feel the spirit and courage folks have in Libby. I want him to look into their eyes, like I have, and hear their stories."

Baucus said he would like for Leavitt to — among other things — tour the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases, which Baucus helped establish with fed-



LEAVITT

eral funds, and hold town meeting.

Mr. Baucus has been critical of the EPA's slow cleanup progress, noting the agency has identified more than 1,300 properties in Libby that still require cleanup and that the agency's timeframe for cleaning up the town has been pushed back from 2004 to 2008. Baucus says it's unacceptable that

the agency has completed only 10 percent of the cleanup work needed to give the town a clean bill of health, despite having been in Libby since late 1999.

During a recent Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing, Baucus took Leavitt to task for not being more vocal about the agency's below-par funding levels.

Baucus said President Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget request to Congress includes \$7.8 billion for the EPA, a 7.2 percent cut from 2004 funding levels.

"People are dead and dying in Libby from decades of exposure to asbestos," said Baucus, a senior member of the Environment and Public Works Committee. "I know that I've said it over and over and over again. But it always bears repeating. We cannot forget the human scale of the Libby tragedy, and that's what must drive the

EPA's commitment to finish the fine response and clean-up work that it started back in 1999. ... The people in Libby are working hard to revitalize their economy and their community, and are rightly proud of their resilience and their ability to land on their feet," Baucus said. "They deserve all the help we can give them to make their town whole again."

Baucus said he is also concerned that no funds have been set aside to cleanup Troy, which is also contaminated by asbestos from the Grace mine.

Since November 1999, Baucus has personally visited Libby more than 13 times and has secured millions of federal dollars to help with cleanup and health care efforts. Additional details about the Baucus-Leavitt Libby visit will be released when they become available.